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Lenin, Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, 1905

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Lenin

Two Tactics of Social-Democracy

in the

Democratic Revolution

1905



The Russian Revolution of 1905

Preface

In a revolutionary period it is very difficult to keep abreast of events, which provide an astonishing amount of new material for an evaluation of the tactical slogans of revolutionary parties. The present pamphlet was written before the Odessa events.¹ We have already pointed out in the Proletary (No. 9 — "Revolution Teaches") that these events have forced even those Social-Democrats who created the "uprising-as-a-process" theory and who rejected propaganda for a provisional revolutionary government actually to pass over, or begin to pass over, to the side of their opponents. Revolution undoubtedly teaches with a rapidity and thoroughness which appear incredible in peaceful periods of political development. And, what is particularly important, it teaches not only the leaders, but the masses as well.

There is not the slightest doubt that the revolution will teach social-democratism to the masses of the workers in Russia. The revolution will confirm the program and tactics of Social-Democracy in actual practice, by demonstrating the true nature of the various classes of society, by demonstrating the bourgeois character of our democracy and the real aspirations of the peasantry, who, while being revolutionary in the bourgeois-democratic sense, harbour not the idea of "socialisation," but of a new class struggle between the peasant bourgeoisie and the rural proletariat. The old illusions of the old Narodism, which are so clearly visible, for instance, in the draft programme of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party on the question of the development of capitalism in Russia, the question of the democratic character of our "society" and the question of the significance of a complete victory of a peasant uprising—all these illusions will be mercilessly and completely blown to the winds by the revolution. For the first time it will give the various classes their real political baptism. These classes will emerge from the revolution with a definite political physiognomy, for they will have revealed themselves, not only in the programs and tactical slogans of their ideologists, but also in the open political action of the masses.

Undoubtedly, the revolution will teach us, and will teach the masses of the people. But the question that now confronts a militant political party is: Shall we be able to teach the revolution anything? Shall we be able to make use of the correctness of our Social-Democratic doctrine, of our bond with the only thoroughly revolutionary class, the proletariat, to put a proletarian imprint on the revolution, to carry the revolution to a real and decisive victory, not in word but in deed, and to paralyse the instability, half-heartedness and treachery of the democratic bourgeoisie?

It is to this end that we must direct all our efforts, and the achievement of it will depend, on the one hand, on the accuracy of our appraisal of the political situation, on the correctness of our tactical slogans, and, on the other hand, on whether these slogans will be backed by the real fighting strength of the masses of the workers. All the usual, regular, current work of all the organisations and groups of our Party, the

work of propaganda, agitation and organisation, is directed towards strengthening and expanding the ties with the masses. This work is always necessary; but in a revolutionary period less than in any other can it be considered sufficient. At such a time the working class feels an instinctive urge for open revolutionary action, and we must learn to set the aims of this action correctly, and then make these aims as widely known and understood as possible. It must not be forgotten that the current pessimism about our ties with the masses very often serves as a screen for bourgeois ideas regarding the role of the proletariat in the revolution. Undoubtedly, we still have a great deal to do to educate and organise the working class; but the whole question now is: Where should the main political emphasis in this work of education and of organisation be placed? On the trade unions and legally existing societies, or on armed insurrection, on the work of creating a revolutionary army and a revolutionary government? Both serve to educate and organise the working class. Both are, of course, necessary. But the whole question now, in the present revolution, amounts to this: what is to be emphasised in the work of educating and organising the working class, the former or the latter?

The outcome of the revolution depends on whether the working class will play the part of a subsidiary to the bourgeoisie, a subsidiary that is powerful in the force of its onslaught against the autocracy but impotent politically, or whether it will play the part of leader of the people's revolution. The more intelligent representatives of the bourgeoisie are perfectly aware of this.

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Chapter 5: How Should "The Revolution Be Pushed Forward"?

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The tactical slogans we have formulated in the name of the Third Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party coincide with the slogans of the democratic-revolutionary and republican bourgeoisie. In Russia this bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have not yet formed themselves into a big people's party.¹ But only one who is utterly ignorant of what is now taking place in Russia can doubt that elements of such a party exist. We intend to guide (if the great Russian revolution makes progress) not only the proletariat, organised by the Social-Democratic Party, but also this petty bourgeoisie, which is capable of marching side by side with us.

Through its resolution the Conference unconsciously *descends* to the level of the liberal and monarchist bourgeoisie. The Party Congress in its resolution consciously *raises* to its own level those elements of the revolutionary democracy that are capable of waging a struggle and not of acting as brokers.

Such elements are mostly to be found among the peasants. In classifying the big social groups according to their political tendencies we can, without danger of serious error, identify revolutionary and republican democracy with the mass of the peasants—of course, in the same sense and with the same reservations and implied conditions as we can identify the working class with Social-Democracy. In other words, we can also formulate our conclusions in the following terms: in a revolutionary period the Conference in its *national-wide*² *political* slogans unconsciously *descends to the level of the mass of the landlords*. The Party Congress in its national political slogans *raises the peasant masses to the revolutionary level*. We challenge anyone who because of this conclusion may accuse us of evincing a penchant for paradoxes, to refute the proposition that if we are not strong enough to bring the revolution to a successful conclusion, if the revolution terminates in a "decisive victory" in the *Osvobozhdenitsi* sense, i.e., exclusively in the form of a representative assembly convened by the tsar, which could be called a constituent assembly only in derision—then this will be a revolution in which the *landlord and big bourgeois* element will preponderate. On the other hand, if we are destined to live through a really great revolution, if history prevents a "miscarriage" this time, if we are strong enough to carry the revolution to a successful conclusion, to a decisive victory, not in the *Osvobozhdeniye* or the new *Iskra* sense of the word, then it will be a revolution in which the peasant and proletarian element will preponderate.

Some people may, perhaps, interpret our admission that such a preponderance is possible as a renunciation of the view that the impending revolution will be bourgeois in character. This is very likely, considering how this concept is misused in the *Iskra*. For this reason it will not be at all superfluous to dwell on this question.

Chapter 10: "Revolutionary Communes" and the Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry

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The Third Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. gave perfectly clear answers to these questions and drew up a complete program of these changes—the minimum program of our Party. The word "commune," however, is not an answer at all; it only serves to confuse people by the distant echo of a sonorous phrase, or empty rhetoric. The more we cherish the memory of the Paris Commune of 1871, for instance, the less permissible is it to refer to it offhand, without analysing its mistakes and the special conditions attending it. To do so would be to follow the absurd example of the Blanquists—whom Engels ridiculed—who (in 1874, in their "Manifesto") paid homage to every act of the Commune.[B] What reply will a "Conference" give to a worker who asks him about *this* "revolutionary commune" that is mentioned in the resolution? He will only be able to tell him that this is the name, known in history, of a workers' government that was unable to, and could not at that time, distinguish between the elements of a democratic revolution and those of a socialist revolution, that confused the tasks of fighting for a republic with the tasks of fighting for Socialism, that was unable to carry out the task of launching an energetic military offensive against Versailles, that made a mistake in not seizing the Bank of France, etc. In short, whether in your answer you refer to the Paris Commune or to some other commune, your answer will be: it was a government *such as ours should not be*. A fine answer, indeed! Does it not testify to pedantic moralising and impotence on the part of a revolutionary who says nothing about the practical program of the Party and in appropriately begins to give lessons in history in a resolution? Does this not reveal the very mistake which they unsuccessfully accuse us of having committed, i.e., of confusing a democratic revolution with a socialist revolution, between which none of the "communes" was able to distinguish?

Extending the insurrection and the disorganising of the government are presented as the "exclusive" aim of the provisional government. (so inappropriately termed a "commune"). Taken in its literal sense, the word "exclusively" eliminates all other aims; it is an echo of the absurd theory of "only from below." Such elimination of other aims is another instance of short-sightedness and lack of reflection. A "revolutionary commune," i.e., a revolutionary government, even if only in a single city, will inevitably have to administer (even if provisionally, "partly, episodically") *all* the affairs of state, and it is the height of folly to hide one's head under one's wing and refuse to see this. This government will have to enact an eight-hour working day, establish workers' inspection of factories, institute free universal education, introduce the election of judges, set up peasant committees, etc.; in a word, it will certainly have to carry out a number of reforms. To designate these reforms as "helping to spread the insurrection" would be playing with words and deliberately causing greater confusion in a matter which requires absolute clarity.

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Of course, in actual historical circumstances, the elements of the past become interwoven with those of the future, the two paths cross. Wage labour, with its struggle against private property, exists under the autocracy as well; it is generated even under serfdom. But this does not in the least prevent us from drawing a logical and historical dividing line between the major stages of development. We all draw a distinction between bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution, we all absolutely insist on the necessity of drawing a most strict line between them; but can it be denied that individual, particular elements of the two revolutions become interwoven in history? Have there not been a number of socialist movements and attempts at establishing Socialism in the period of democratic revolutions in Europe? And will not the future socialist revolution in Europe still have to do a very great deal that has been left undone in the field of democracy?

A Social-Democrat must never for a moment forget that the proletariat will inevitably have to wage the class struggle for Socialism even against the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. This is beyond doubt. Hence the absolute necessity of a separate, independent, strictly class party of Social-Democracy. Hence the temporary nature of our tactics of "striking jointly" with the bourgeoisie and the duty of keeping a strict watch "over our ally, as over an enemy," etc. All this is also beyond the slightest doubt. But it would be ridiculous and reactionary to deduce from this that we must forget, ignore or neglect these tasks which, although transient and temporary, are vital at the present time. The fight against the autocracy is a temporary and transient task of the Socialists, but to ignore or neglect this task in any way would be tantamount to betraying Socialism and rendering a service to reaction. The revolutionary-Democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry is unquestionably only a transient, temporary aim of the Socialists, but to ignore this aim in the period of a democratic revolution would be downright reactionary.

Concrete political aims must be set in concrete circumstances. All things are relative, all things flow and all things change. The program of the German Social-Democratic Party does not contain the demand for a republic. The situation in Germany is such that this question can in practice hardly be separated from the question of Socialism (although even as regards Germany, Engels, in his comments on the draft of the Erfurt Program in 1891, warned against belittling the importance of a republic and of the struggle for a republic!). In the Russian Social-Democratic Party the question of eliminating the demand for a republic from its program and agitation has never even arisen, for in our country there can be no talk of an indissoluble connection between the question of a republic and the question of Socialism. It was quite natural for a German Social-Democrat of 1898 not to put the special question of a republic in the forefront, and this evokes neither surprise nor condemnation. But a German Social-

Democrat who in 1848 would have left the question of a republic in the shade would have been a downright traitor to the revolution. There is no such thing as abstract truth. Truth is always concrete.

The time will come when the struggle against the Russian autocracy will end and the period of democratic revolution will be over in Russia; then it will be ridiculous to talk about "singleness of will" of the proletariat and the peasantry, about a democratic dictatorship, etc. When that time comes we shall attend directly to the question of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat and deal with it at greater length. But at present the party of the advanced class cannot but strive most energetically for a decisive victory of the democratic revolution over tsarism. And a decisive victory means nothing else than the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

We would remind the reader that in the polemics between the *Iskra* and the *Vperyod*, the former referred among other things to Engels' letter to Turati, in which Engels warned the (future) leader of the Italian reformists not to confuse the democratic with the socialist revolution. The impending revolution in Italy—wrote Engels about the political situation in Italy in 1894—will be a petty-bourgeois, democratic and not a socialist revolution. The *Iskra* reproached the *Vperyod* with having departed from the principle laid down by Engels. This reproach was unjustified, because the *Vperyod* (No. 14)[in "Social-Democracy and the Provisional Revolutionary Government"] fully acknowledged, on the whole, the correctness of Marx's theory of the difference between the three main forces in the revolutions of the nineteenth century. According to this theory, the following forces take a stand against the old order, against the autocracy, feudalism, serfdom: 1) the liberal big bourgeoisie, 2) the radical petty bourgeoisie, and 3) the proletariat.

The first fights for nothing more than a constitutional monarchy; the second, for a democratic republic; the third, for a socialist revolution. To confuse the petty-bourgeois struggle for a complete democratic revolution with the proletarian struggle for a socialist revolution spells political bankruptcy for a Socialist. Marx's warning to this effect is quite justified. But it is precisely for this very reason that the slogan "revolutionary communes" is erroneous, because the very mistake committed by the communes that have existed in history is that they confused the democratic revolution with the socialist revolution. On the other hand, our slogan—a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry—fully safeguards us against this mistake. While recognising the uncontestably bourgeois nature of the revolution, which is incapable of *directly* overstepping the bounds a mere democratic revolution, our slogan *pushes forward* this particular revolution and strives to mould it into forms most advantageous to the proletariat; consequently, it strives to make the very most of the democratic revolution in order to attain the greatest success in the further struggle of the proletariat for Socialism.

Chapter 13: Conclusion. Dare We Win?

People who are superficially acquainted with the state of affairs in Russian Social-Democracy, or who judge as mere onlookers without knowing the whole history of our internal Party struggle since the days of Economism, very often also dismiss the disagreements on tactics which have now become crystallised, especially after the Third Congress, with the simple argument that there are two natural, inevitable and quite reconcilable trends in every Social-Democratic movement. One side, they say, lays special emphasis on the ordinary, current, everyday work, on the necessity of developing propaganda and agitation, of preparing forces, deepening the movement, etc., while the other side lays emphasis on the militant, general political, revolutionary tasks of the movement, points to the necessity of armed insurrection, advances the slogans: for a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship, for a provisional revolutionary government. Neither one side nor the other should exaggerate, they say; extremes are bad, both here and there (and, generally speaking, everywhere in the world), etc., etc.

The cheap truisms of worldly (and "political" in quotation marks) wisdom, which such arguments undoubtedly contain, too often cover up a failure to understand the urgent and acute needs of the Party. Take the differences on tactics that now exist among the Russian Social-Democrats. of course, the special emphasis laid on the everyday, routine aspect of the work, such as we observe in the new *Iskra*-ist arguments about tactics, could not in itself present any danger and could not give rise to any divergence of opinion regarding tactical slogans. But the moment you compare the resolutions of the Third Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party with the resolutions of the Conference this divergence becomes strikingly obvious.

What, then, is the trouble? The trouble is that, in the first place, it is not enough to point abstractly to the two currents in the movement and to the harmfulness of extremes. One must know concretely what the given movement is suffering from at the given time, what constitutes the real political danger to the Party at the present time. Secondly, one must know what real political forces are profiting by this or that tactical slogan—or perhaps by the absence of this or that slogan. To listen to the new *Iskra*-ists, one would arrive at the conclusion that the Social-Democratic Party is threatened with the danger of throwing overboard propaganda and agitation, the economic struggle and criticism of bourgeois democracy, of becoming inordinately absorbed in military preparations, armed attacks, the seizure of power, etc. Actually, however, real danger is threatening the Party from an entirely different quarter. Anyone who is at all closely familiar with the state of the movement, anyone who follows it carefully and thoughtfully, cannot fail to see the ridiculous side of the new *Iskra*'s fears. The entire work of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party has already been fully moulded into firm, immutable forms which absolutely guarantee that our main attention will be fixed on propaganda and agitation, impromptu and

mass meetings, on the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets, assisting in the economic struggle and championing the slogans of that struggle. There is not a single Party committee, not a single district committee, not a single central delegates' meeting or a single factory group where ninety-nine per cent of all the attention, energy and time are not always and constantly devoted to these functions, which have become firmly established ever since the middle of the 'nineties. Only those who are entirely unfamiliar with the movement are ignorant of this. Only very naïve or ill-informed people can be taken in by the new *Iskra*-ists' repetition of stated truths when it is done with an air of great importance.

The fact is that not only is no excessive zeal displayed among us with regard to the tasks of insurrection, to the general political slogans and to the matter of leading the entire popular revolution, but, on the contrary, it is *backwardness* in this very respect that stands out most strikingly, constitutes our weakest spot and a real danger to the movement, which may degenerate, and in some places is degenerating, from one that is revolutionary in deeds into one that is revolutionary in words. Among the many, many hundreds of organisations, groups and circles that are conducting the work of the Party you will not find a single one which has not from its very inception conducted the kind of everyday work about which the wiseacres of the new *Iskra* now talk with the air of people who have discovered new truths. On the other hand, you will find only an insignificant percentage of groups and circles that have understood the tasks an armed insurrection entails, which have begun to carry them out, and have realised the necessity of leading the entire popular revolution against tsarism, the necessity of advancing for that purpose certain definite progressive slogans and no other.

We are incredibly behind in our progressive and genuinely revolutionary tasks, in very many instances we have not even become conscious of them; here and there we have failed to notice the strengthening of revolutionary bourgeois democracy owing to our backwardness in this respect. But the writers in the new *Iskra*, turning their backs on the course of events and on the requirements of the times, keep repeating insistently: Don't forget the old! Don't let yourselves be carried away by the new! This is the principal and unvarying leitmotif of all the important resolutions of the Conference; whereas in the Congress resolutions you just as unvaryingly read: while confirming the old (and without stopping to chew it over and over, for the very reason that it is old and has already been settled and recorded in literature, in resolutions and by experience), we put forward a new task, draw attention to it, issue a new slogan, and demand that the genuinely revolutionary Social-Democrats immediately set to work to put it into effect.

That is how matters really stand with regard to the question of the two trends in Social-Democratic tactics. The revolutionary period has called forth new tasks, which only the totally blind can fail to see. And some Social-Democrats unhesitatingly recognise these tasks and place them on the order of the day, declaring: the armed insurrection brooks no delay, prepare yourselves for it immediately and energetically,

remember that it is indispensable for a decisive victory, issue the slogans of a republic, of a provisional government, of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. Others, however, draw back, mark time, write prefaces instead of giving slogans; instead of pointing to the new while confirming the old, they chew this old tediously and at great length, inventing pretexts to avoid the new, unable to determine the conditions for a decisive victory or to issue the slogans which alone are in line with the striving to attain complete victory.

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Anyone who ponders over these facts will understand the real significance of the stock reference to the two sides and the two trends in the Social-Democratic movement. For a study of these trends on a large scale, take Bernsteinism. The Bernsteinians have been dinning into our ears in exactly the same way that it is they who understand the true needs of the proletariat, the tasks connected with the growth of its forces, with rendering the entire activity more profound, with preparing the elements of a new society, with propaganda and agitation! Bernstein says: we demand a frank recognition of what is, thus sanctifying a "movement" *without* "final aims", sanctifying defensive tactics only, preaching the tactics of fear "lest the bourgeoisie recoil". The Bernsteinians also raised an outcry against the "Jacobinism" of the revolutionary Social-Democrats, against the "publicists" who fail to understand the "initiative of the workers," etc., etc.

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At the head of the whole of the people, and particularly of the peasantry—for complete freedom, for a consistent democratic revolution, for a republic! At the head of all the toilers and the exploited—for Socialism! Such must in practice be the policy of the revolutionary proletariat, such is the class slogan which must permeate and determine the solution of every tactical problem, every practical step of the workers' party during the revolution.

From: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/tactics/index.htm>

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The whole book is at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm>

Rosa Luxemburg

The Mass Strike

1906



[Rosa Luxemburg, born 1871, assassinated 1919](#)

7. The Role of the Mass Strike in the Revolution

We have seen that the mass strike in Russia does not represent an artificial product of premeditated tactics on the part of the social democrats, but a natural historical phenomenon on the basis of the present revolution. Now what are the factors which in Russia have brought forth this new phenomenal form of the revolution?

The Russian revolution has for first task the abolition of absolutism and the establishment of a modern bourgeois-parliamentary constitutional state. It is exactly the same in form as that which confronted Germany in the March 1848 Revolution, and the Great French Revolution of the end of the eighteenth century. But the condition, the historical milieu, in which these formally analogous revolutions took place, are fundamentally different from those of present-day Russia. The essential difference is that between those bourgeois revolutions in the West, and the current bourgeois revolution in the East, the whole cycle of capitalist development has run its course. And this development had seized not only the West European countries, but also absolutist Russia. Large-scale industry with all its consequences – modern class divisions, acute social contrasts, modern life in large cities and the modern proletariat – has become in Russia the prevailing form, that is, in social development the decisive form of production.

The remarkable, contradictory, historical situation results from this that the bourgeois revolution, in accordance with its formal tasks will, in the first place, be carried out by a modern class-conscious proletariat, and in an international milieu whose distinguishing characteristic is the ruin of bourgeois democracy. It is not the bourgeoisie that is now the driving force of revolution as in the earlier revolutions of the West, while the proletarian masses, swamped amidst a petty-bourgeois mass, simply furnish cannon-fodder for the bourgeoisie, but on the contrary, it is the class-conscious proletariat that is the active and leading element, while the big bourgeois turns out to be either openly against the revolution or liberal moderates, and only the rural petit-bourgeoisie and the urban petit-bourgeois intelligentsia are definitively oppositional and even revolutionary minded.

The Russian proletariat, however, who are destined to play the leading part in the bourgeois revolution, enter the fight free from all illusions of bourgeois democracy, with a strongly developed consciousness of their own specific class interests, and at a time when the antagonism between capital and labour has reached its height. This contradictory situation finds expression in the fact that in this formally bourgeois revolution, the antagonism of bourgeois society to absolutism is governed by the antagonism of the proletariat to bourgeois society, that the struggle of the proletariat to bourgeois society is directed simultaneously and with equal energy against both absolutism and capitalist exploitation, and that the programme of the revolutionary struggle concentrates with equal emphasis on political freedom, the

winning of the eight-hour day, and a human standard of material existence for the proletariat. This two-fold character of the Russian Revolution is expressed in that close union of the economic with the political struggle and in their mutual interaction which we have seen is a feature of the Russian events and which finds its appropriate expression in the mass strike.

In the earlier bourgeois revolution where, on the one hand, the political training and the leadership of the revolutionary masses were undertaken by the bourgeois parties, and where, on the other hand, it was merely a question of overthrowing the old government, the brief battle at the barricades was the appropriate form of the revolutionary struggle. Today the working class must educate itself, marshal its forces, and direct itself in the course of the revolutionary struggle and thus the revolution is directed as much against capitalist exploitation as against the *ancien regime*; so much so that the mass strike appears as the natural means to recruit, organize and prepare the widest proletarian layers for revolutionary struggle, as the means to undermine and overthrow the old state power, as well as to contain the capitalist exploitation. The urban industrial proletariat is now the soul of the revolution in Russia. But in order to carry through a direct political struggle as a mass, the proletariat must first be assembled as a mass, and for this purpose they must come out of the factory and workshop, mine and foundry, must overcome the atomisation and decay to which they are condemned under the daily yoke of capitalism.

The mass strike is the first natural, impulsive form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and the more highly developed the antagonism is between capital and labour, the more effective and decisive must mass strikes become. The chief form of previous bourgeois revolutions, the fight at the barricades, the open conflict with the armed power of the state, is in the revolution today only the culminating point, only a moment on the process of the proletarian mass struggle. And therewith in the new form of the revolution there is reached that civilising and mitigating of the class struggle which was prophesied by the opportunists of German social democracy – the Bernsteins, Davids, etc. It is true that these men saw the desired civilising and mitigating of the class struggle in the light of petty bourgeois democratic illusions – they believed that the class struggle would shrink to an exclusively parliamentary contest that and that street fighting would simply be done away with. History has found the solution in a deeper and finer fashion: in the advent of revolutionary mass strikes, which, of course, in no way replaces brutal street fights or renders them unnecessary, but which reduces them to a moment in the long period of political struggle, and which at the same time unites with the revolutionary period and enormous cultural work in the most exact sense of the words: the material and intellectual elevation of the whole working class through the “civilising” of the barbaric forms of capitalist exploitation.

The mass strike is thus shown to be not a specifically Russian product, springing from absolutism but a universal form of the proletarian class struggle resulting from the

present stage of capitalist development and class relations. From this standpoint the three bourgeois revolutions – the Great French Revolution, the German Revolution of March, and the present Russian Revolution – form a continuous chain of development in which the fortunes and the end of the capitalist century are to be seen. In the Great French Revolution the still wholly underdeveloped internal contradictions of bourgeois society gave scope for a long period of violent struggles, in which all the antagonisms which first germinated and ripened in the heat of the revolution raged unhindered and unrestrained in a spirit of reckless radicalism. A century later the revolution of the German bourgeoisie, which broke out midway in the development of capitalism, was already hampered on both sides by the antagonism of interests and the equilibrium of strength between capital and labour, and was smothered in a bourgeois-feudal compromise, and shortened to a miserable episode ending in words.

Another half century, and the present Russian Revolution stands at a point of the historical path which is already over the summit, which is on the other side of the culminating point of capitalist society, at which the bourgeois revolutions cannot again be smothered by the antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, but, will, on the contrary, expand into a new lengthy period of violent social struggles, at which the balancing of the account with absolutism appears a trifle in comparison with the many new accounts which the revolution itself opens up. The present revolution realises in the particular affairs of absolutist Russia the general results of international capitalist development, and appears not so much as the last successor of the old bourgeois revolutions as the forerunner of the new series of proletarian revolutions of the West. The most backward country of all, just because it has been so unpardonably late with its bourgeois revolution, shows ways and methods of further class struggle to the proletariat of Germany and the most advanced capitalist countries.

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8. Need for United Action of Trade Unions and Social Democracy

The most important desideratum which is to be hoped for from the German working class in the period of great struggles which will come sooner or later is, after complete resoluteness and consistency of tactics, the utmost capacity for action, and therefore the utmost possible unity of the leading social democratic part of the proletarian masses. Meanwhile the first weak attempts at the preparation of great mass actions have discovered a serious drawback in this connection: the total separation and independence of the two organisations of the labour movement, the social democracy and the trade unions.

It is clear on a closer consideration of the mass strikes in Russia as well as of the conditions in Germany itself, that any great mass action, if it is not confined to a mere one-day demonstration, but is intended to be a real fighting action, cannot possibly be thought of as a so-called political mass strike. In such an action in Germany the trade-unions would be implicated as much as the social democrats. Not because the trade-union leaders imagine that the social democrats, in view of their smaller organisation, would have no other resources than the co-operation of one and a quarter million trade-unionists and without them would be unable to do anything, but because of a much more deep-lying motive: because every direct mass action of the period of open class struggles would be at the same time both political and economic. If in Germany, from any cause and at any time, it should come to great political struggles, to mass strikes, then at that time an era of violent trade-union struggles would begin in Germany, and events would not stop to inquire whether the trade-union leaders had given their consent to the movement or not. Whether they stand aside or endeavour to resist the movement, the result of their attitude will only be that the trade-union leaders, like the party leaders in the analogous case, will simply be swept aside by the rush of events, and the economic and the political struggles of the masses will be fought out without them.

As a matter-of-fact the separation of the political, and the economic struggle and the independence of each, is nothing but an artificial product of the parliamentary period, even if historically determined. On the one hand in the peaceful, "normal" course of bourgeois society, the economic struggle is split into a multitude of individual struggles in every undertaking and dissolved in every branch of production. On the other hand the political struggle is not directed by the masses themselves in a direct action, but in correspondence with the form of the bourgeois state, in a representative fashion, by the presence of legislative representation. As soon as a period of revolutionary struggle commences, that is, as soon as the masses appear on the scene of conflict, the breaking up the economic struggle into many parts, as well as the indirect parliamentary form of the political struggle ceases; in a revolutionary mass action the political struggle ceases; in a revolutionary mass action the political and economic struggle are one, and the artificial boundary between trade union and

social democracy as two separate, wholly independent forms of the labour movement, is simply swept away. But what finds concrete expression in the revolutionary mass movement finds expression also in the parliamentary period as an actual state of affairs. There are not two different class struggles of the working class, an economic and a political one, but only *one* class struggle, which aims at one and the same time at the limitation of capitalist exploitation within bourgeois society, and at the abolition of exploitation together with bourgeois society itself.

When these two sides of the class struggle are separated from one another for technical reasons in the parliamentary period, they do not form two parallel concurrent actions, but merely two phases, two stages of the struggle for emancipation of the working class. The trade-union struggle embraces the immediate interests, and the social democratic struggle the future interests, of the labour movement. The communists, says the *Communist Manifesto*, represent, as against various group interests of the proletariat as a whole, and in the various stages of development of the class struggle, they represent the interests of the whole movement, that is, the ultimate goal – the liberation of the proletariat. The trade unions represent only the group interests and only one stage of development of the labour movement. Social democracy represents the working class and the cause of its liberation as a whole. The relation of the trade unions to social democracy is therefore a part of the whole, and when, amongst the trade-union leaders, the theory of “equal authority” of trade-unions and social democracy finds so much favour, it rests upon a fundamental misconception of the essence of trade-unionism itself and of its role in the general struggle for freedom of the working class.

This theory of the parallel action of social democracy and the trade-unions and of their “equal authority” is nevertheless not altogether without foundation, but has its historical roots. It rests upon the illusion of the peaceful, “normal” period of bourgeois society, in which the political struggle of social democracy appears to be consumed in the parliamentary struggle. The parliamentary struggle, however, the counterpart of the trade-union struggle, is equally with it, a fight conducted exclusively on the basis of the bourgeois social order. It is by its very nature, political reform work, as that of the trade-unions is economic reform work. It represents political work for the present, as trade-unions represent economic work for the present. It is, like them, merely a phase, a stage of development in the complete process of the proletarian class struggle whose ultimate goal is as far beyond the parliamentary struggle as it is beyond the trade-union struggle. The parliamentary struggle is, in relation to social democratic policy, also a part of the whole, exactly as trade-union work is. Social democracy today comprises the parliamentary and the trade-union struggle in one class struggle aiming at the abolition of the bourgeois social order.

The theory of the “equal authority” of trade-unions and social democracy is likewise not a mere theoretical misunderstanding, not a mere case of confusion but an expression of the well-known tendency of that opportunist wing of social democracy

which reduced the political struggle of the working class to the parliamentary contest, and desires to change social democracy from a revolutionary proletarian party into a petty-bourgeois reform one. If social democracy should accept the theory of the “equal authority” of the trade-unions, it would thereby accept, indirectly and tacitly, that transformation which has long been striven for by the representatives of the opportunist tendency.

In Germany, however, there is such a shifting of relations within the labour movement as is impossible in any other country. The theoretical conception, according to which the trade-unions are merely a part of social democracy, finds its classic expression in Germany in fact, in actual practice, and that in three directions. First, the German trade-unions are a direct product of social democracy; it was social democracy which created the beginnings of the present trade-union movement in Germany and which enabled it to attain such great dimensions, and it is social democracy which supplies it to this day with its leaders and the most active promoters of its organisation.

Second, the German trade-unions are a product of social democracy also in the sense that social democratic teaching in the soul of trade-union practice, as the trade-unions owe their superiority over all bourgeois and denominational trade-unions to the idea of the class struggle; their practical success, their power, is a result of the circumstance that their practice is illuminated by the theory of scientific socialism and they are thereby raised above the level of a narrow-minded socialism. The strength of the “practical policy” of the German trade-unions lies in their insight into the deeper social and economic connections of the capitalist system; but they owe this insight entirely to the theory of scientific socialism upon which their practice is based. Viewed in this way, any attempt to emancipate the trade-unions from the social democratic theory in favour of some other “trade-union theory” opposed to social democracy, is, from the standpoint of the trade-unions themselves and of their future, nothing but an attempt to commit suicide. The separation of trade-union practice from the theory of scientific socialism would mean to the German trade-unions the immediate loss of all their superiority over all kinds of bourgeois trade-unions, and their fall from their present height to the level of unsteady groping and mere dull empiricism.

Thirdly and finally, the trade-unions are, although their leaders have gradually lost sight of the fact, even as regards their numerical strength, a direct product of the social democratic movement and the social democratic agitation. It is true that in many districts trade-union agitation precedes social democratic agitation, and that everywhere trade-union work prepares the way for party work. From the point of view of effect, party and trade-unions assist each other to the fullest extent. But when the picture of the class struggle in Germany is looked at as a whole and its more deep-seated associations, the proportions are considerably altered. Many trade-union leaders are in the habit of looking down triumphantly from the proud height of their membership of one and a quarter million on the miserable organised

members of the Social Democratic Party, not yet half a million strong, and of recalling the time, ten or twelve years ago, when those in the ranks of social democracy were pessimistic as to the prospects of trade-union development.

They do see that between these two things – the large number of organised trade unionists and the small number of organised Social Democrats – *there exists in a certain degree a direct causal connection*. Thousands and thousands of workers do not join the party organisations precisely because they join the trade-unions. According to the theory, all the workers must be doubly organised, must attend two kinds of meetings, pay double contributions, read two kinds of workers' papers, etc. But for this it is necessary to have a higher standard of intelligence and of that idealism which, from a pure feeling of duty to the labour movement, is prepared for the daily sacrifice of time and money, and finally, a higher standard of that passionate interest in the actual life of the party which can only be engendered by membership of the party organisation. All this is true of the most enlightened and intelligent minority of social democratic workers in the large towns, where party life is full and attractive and where the workers' standard of living is high. Amongst the wider sections of the working masses in the large towns, however, as well as in the provinces, in the smaller and the smallest towns where political life is not an independent thing but a mere reflex of the course of events in the capital, where consequently, party life is poor and monotonous, and where, finally, the economic standard of life of the workers is, for the most part, miserable, it is very difficult to secure the double form of organisation.

For the social democratically-minded worker from the masses the question will be solved by his joining his trade-union. The immediate interests of his economic struggle which are conditioned by the nature of the struggle itself cannot be advanced in any other way than by membership of a trade-union organisation. The contribution which he pays, often amidst considerable sacrifice of his standard of living, bring him immediate, visible results. His social democratic inclinations, however, enable him to participate in various kinds of work without belonging to a special party organisation; by voting at parliamentary elections, by attendance at social democratic public meetings, by following the reports of social democratic speeches in representatives bodies, and by reading the party press. Compare in this connection the number of social democratic electors or the number of subscribers to *Vorwärts* with the number of organised party members in Berlin!

And what is most decisive, the social democratically-minded average worker who, as a simple man, can have no understanding of the intricate and fine so-called two-soul theory, feels that he is, even in the trade union, *social democratically* organised. Although the central committees of the unions have no official party label, the workman from the masses in every city and town sees the head of his trade-union as the most active leader, those colleagues whom he knows also as comrades and social democrats in public life, now as Reichstag, Landtag or local representatives, now as trusted men of the social democracy, members of election committees, party editors

and secretaries, or merely as speakers and agitators. Further, he hears expressed in the agitational work of his trade-union much the same ideas, pleasing and intelligible to him, of capitalist exploitation, class relations, etc., as those that have come to him from social democratic agitation. Indeed, the most and best loved of the speakers at trade-union meetings are those same social democrats.

Thus everything combines to give the average class-conscious worker the feeling that he, in being organised in his trade-union, is also a member of his labour party and is social democratically organised, *and therein lies the peculiar recruiting strength of the German trade-unions*. Not because of the appearance of neutrality, but because of the social democratic reality of their being, have the central unions being enabled to attain their present strength. This is simply through the co-existence of the various unions – Catholic, Hirsch-Dunker, etc. – founded by bourgeois parties by which it was sought to establish the necessity for that political “neutrality.” When the German worker who has full freedom of choice to attach himself to a Christian, Catholic, Evangelical or Free-thinking trade-union, chooses none of these but the “free trade-union” instead, or leaves one of the former to join the latter, he does so only because he considers that the central unions are the avowed organisations of the modern class struggle, or, what is the same thing in Germany, that they are social democratic trade-unions.

In a word the appearance of “neutrality,” which exists in the minds of many trade-union leaders, does not exist for the mass of organised trade-unionists. And that is the good fortune of the trade-union movement. If the appearance of “neutrality” that alienation and separation of the trade-unions from social democracy, really and truly becomes a reality in the eyes of the proletarian masses, then the trade-unions would immediately lose all their advantages over competing bourgeois unions, and therewith their recruiting power, their living fire. This is conclusively proved by the facts which are generally known. The appearance of party-political “neutrality” of the trade-unions could, as a means of attraction, render inestimable service in a country in which social democracy itself has no credit among the masses, in which the odium attaching a workers’ organisation injures it in the eyes of the masses rather than advantages it – where, in a word, the trade-unions must first of all recruit their troops from a wholly unenlightened, bourgeois-minded mass.

The best example of such a country was, throughout the whole of the last century, and is to a certain extent today, Great Britain. In Germany, however, party relations are altogether different. In a country, in which social democracy is the most powerful political party, in which its recruiting power is represented by an army of over three million proletarians, it is ridiculous to speak of the deterrent effect of social democracy and of the necessity for a fighting organisation of the workers to ensure political neutrality. The mere comparison of the figures of social democratic voters with the figures of the trade-union organisations in Germany is sufficient to prove to the most simple-minded that the trade-unions in Germany do not, as in England, draw their troops from the unenlightened bourgeois-minded mass, but from the

mass of proletarians already aroused by the social democracy and won by it to the idea of the class struggle. Many trade-union leaders indignantly reject the idea – a requisite of the “theory of neutrality” – and regard the trade-unions as a recruiting school for social democracy. This apparently insulting, but in reality, highly flattering presumption is in Germany reduced to mere fancy by the circumstance that the positions are reversed; it is the social democracy which is the recruiting school for the trade-unions.

Moreover, if the organisational work of the trade-unions is for the most part of a very difficult and troublesome kind, it is, with the exception of a few cases and some districts, not merely because on the whole, the soil has not been prepared by the social democratic plough, but also because the trade-union seed itself, and the sower as well, must also be “red,” social democratic before the harvest can prosper. But when we compare in this way the figures of trade-union strength, not with those of the social democratic organisations, but – which is the only correct way – with those of the mass of social democratic voters, we come to a conclusion which differs considerably from the current view of the matter. The fact then comes to light that the “free trade-unions” actually represent today but a minority of the class-conscious workers of Germany, that even with their one and a quarter million organised members they have not yet been able to draw into their ranks one-half of those already aroused by social democracy.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the facts above cited is that the *complete unity* of the trade-union and the social democratic movements, which is absolutely necessary for the coming mass struggles in Germany, *is actually here*, and that it is incorporated in the wide mass which forms the basis at once of social democracy and trade-unionism, and in whole consciousness both parts of the movement are mingled in a mental unity. The alleged antagonism between social democracy and trade-union officials, which is, however, at the same time an antagonism within the trade-unions between this part of the trade-union leaders and the proletarian mass organised in trade-unions.

The rapid growth of trade-union movement in Germany in the course of the last fifteen years, especially in the period of great economic prosperity from 1895 to 1900 has brought with it a great independence of the trade-unions, a specialising of their methods of struggle, and finally the introduction of a regular trade-union officialdom. All these phenomena are quite understandable and natural historical products of the growth of the trade-unions in this fifteen-year period, and of the economic prosperity and political calm of Germany. They are, although inseparable from certain drawbacks, without doubt a historically necessary evil. But the dialectics of development also brings with it the circumstance that these necessary means of promoting trade-union growth become, on the contrary, obstacles to this further development at a certain stage of organisation and at a certain degree of ripeness of conditions.

The specialisation of professional activity as trade-union leaders, as well as the naturally restricted horizon which is bound up with disconnected economic struggles in a peaceful period, leads only too easily, amongst trade-union officials, to bureaucratism and a certain narrowness of outlook. Both, however, express themselves in a whole series of tendencies which may be fateful in the highest degree for the future of the trade-union movement. There is first of all the overvaluation of the organisation, which from a means has gradually been changed into an end in itself, a precious thing, to which the interests of the struggles should be subordinated. From this also comes that openly admitted need for peace which shrinks from great risks and presumed dangers to the stability of the trade-unions, and further, the overvaluation of the trade-union method of struggle itself, its prospects and its successes.

The trade-union leaders, constantly absorbed in the economic guerrilla war whose plausible task it is to make the workers place the highest value on the smallest economic achievement, every increase in wages and shortening of the working day, gradually lose the power of seeing the larger connections and of taking a survey of the whole position. Only in this way can one explain why many trade-union leaders refer with the greatest satisfaction to the achievements of the last fifteen years, instead of, on the contrary, emphasising the other side of the medal; the simultaneous and immense reduction of the proletarian standard of life by land usury, by the whole tax and customs policy, by landlord rapacity which has increased house rents to such an exorbitant extent, in short, by all the objective tendencies of bourgeois policy which have largely neutralised the advantages of the fifteen years of trade-union struggle. From the *whole* social democratic truth which, while emphasising the importance of the present work and its absolute necessity, attaches the chief importance to the criticism and the limits to this work, the *half* trade-union truth is taken which emphasises only the positive side of the daily struggle.

And finally, from the concealment of the objective limits drawn by the bourgeois social order to the trade-union struggle, there arises a hostility to every theoretical criticism which refers to these limits in connection with the ultimate aims of the labour movement. Fulsome flattery and boundless optimism are considered to be the duty of every “friend of the trade-union movement.” But as the social democratic standpoint consists precisely in fighting against uncritical parliamentary optimism, a front is at last made against the social democratic theory: men grope for a “new trade-union theory,” that is, a theory which would open an illimitable vista of economic progress to the trade-union struggle within the capitalist system, in opposition to the social democratic doctrine. Such a theory has indeed existed for some time – the theory of Professor Sombart which was promulgated with the express intention of driving a wedge between the trade-unions and the social democracy in Germany, and of enticing the trade-unions over to the bourgeois position.

In close connection with these theoretical tendencies is a revolution of leaders and rank-and-file. In place of the direction by colleagues through local committees, with their admitted inadequacy, there appears the business-like direction of the trade-union officials. The initiative and the power of making decisions thereby devolve upon trade-union specialists, so to speak, and the more passive virtue of discipline upon the mass of members. This dark side of officialdom also assuredly conceals considerable dangers for the party, as from the latest innovation, the institution of local party secretaries, it can quite easily result, if the social democratic mass is not careful that these secretariats may remain mere organs for carrying out decisions and not be regarded in any way the appointed bearers of the initiative and of the direction of local party life. But by the nature of the case, by the character of the political struggle, there are narrow bounds drawn to bureaucratism in social democracy as in trade-union life.

But here the technical specialising of wage struggles as, for example, the conclusion of intricate tariff agreements and for the like, frequently means that the mass of organised workers are prohibited from taking a “survey of the whole industrial life,” and their incapacity for taking decisions is thereby established. A consequence of this conception is the argument with which every theoretical criticism of the prospects and possibilities of trade-union practice is tabooed and which alleges that it represents a danger to the pious trade-union sentiment of the masses. From this, a point of view has been developed, that it is only by blind, child-like faith in the efficacy of the trade-union struggle that the working masses can be won and held for the organisation. In contradistinction to social democracy which bases its influence on the unity of the masses amidst the contradictions of the existing order and in the complicated character of its development, and on the critical attitude of the masses to all factors and stages of their own class struggle, the influence and the power of the trade-unions are founded upon the upside-down theory of the incapacity of the masses for criticism and decision. “The faith of the people must be maintained” – that is the fundamental principle, acting upon which many trade-union officials stamp as attempts on the life of this movement, all criticisms of the objective inadequacy of trade-unionism.

And finally, a result of all this specialisation and this bureaucratism amongst trade-union officials is the great independence and the “neutrality” of the trade-unions in relation to social democracy. The extreme independence of the trade-union organisation is a natural result of its growth, as a relation which has grown out of the technical division of work between the political and the trade-union forms of struggle. The “neutrality” of the German trade-unions, on its part, arose as a product of the reactionary trade-union legislation of the Prusso-German police state. With time, both aspects of their nature have altered. From the condition of political “neutrality” of the trade-unions imposed by the police, a theory of their voluntary neutrality has been evolved as a necessity founded upon the alleged nature of the trade-union struggle itself. And the technical independence of the trade-unions which should rest upon the division of work in the unified social democratic class

struggle, the separation of the trade-unions from social democracy, from its views and its leadership, has been changed into the so-called equal authority of trade-unions and social democracy.

The appearance of separation and equality of trade-unions and social democracy is, however, incorporated chiefly in the trade-union *officials*, and strengthened through the managing apparatus of the trade-unions. Outwardly, by the co-existence of a complete staff of trade-union officials, of a wholly independent central committee, of numerous professional press, and finally of a trade-union congress, the illusion is created of an exact parallel with the managing apparatus of the social democracy, the party executive, the party press and the party conference. This illusion of equality between social democracy and the trade-union had led to, amongst other things, the monstrous spectacle that, in part, quite analogous agendas are discussed at social democratic conferences and trade-union congresses, and that on the same questions different, and even diametrically opposite, decisions are taken. From the natural division of work between the party conference (which represents the general interests and tasks of the labour movement), and the trade-union congress (which deals with the much narrower sphere of social questions and interests) the artificial division has been made of a pretended trade-union and a social democratic outlook in relation to *the same* general questions and interests of the labour movement.

Thus the peculiar position has arisen that this same trade-union movement which below, in the wide proletarian masses, is absolutely one with social democracy, parts abruptly from it above, in the super-structure of management, and sets itself up as an independent great power. The German labour movement therefore assumes the peculiar form of a double pyramid whose base and body consist of one solid mass but whose apexes are wide apart.

It is clear from this presentation of the case in what way alone in a natural and successful manner that compact unity of the German labour movement can be attained which, in view of the coming political class struggles and of the peculiar interests of the further development of the trade-unions, is indispensably necessary. Nothing could be more perverse or more hopeless than to desire to attain the unity desired by means of sporadic and periodical negotiations on individual questions affecting the labour movement between the Social Democratic Party leadership and the trade-union central committees. It is just the highest circles of both forms of the labour movement, which as we have seen, incorporate their separation and self-sufficiency, which are themselves, therefore, the promoters of the illusion of the "equal authority" and of the parallel existence of social democracy and trade-unionism.

To desire the unity of these through the union of the party executive and the general commission is to desire to build a bridge at the very spot where the distance is greater and the crossing more difficult. Not above, amongst the heads of the leading directing organisations and in their federative alliance, but below, amongst the organised proletarian masses, lies the guarantee of the real unity of the labour

movement. In the consciousness of the million trade-unionists, the party and the trade unions are actually *one*, they represent in different forms the *social democratic* struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat. And the necessity automatically arises therefrom of removing any causes of friction which have arisen between the social democracy and a part of the trade unions, of adapting their mutual relation to the consciousness of the proletarian masses, that is, *of re-joining the trade-unions to social democracy*. The synthesis of the real development which led from the original incorporation of the trade-unions to their separation from social democracy will thereby be expressed, and the way will be prepared for the coming period of great proletarian mass struggles during the period of vigorous growth, of both trade-unions and social democracy and their reunion, in the interests of both, will become a necessity.

It is not, of course, a question of the merging of the trade-union organisation in the party, but of the restoration of the unity of social democracy and the trade-unions which corresponds to the actual relation between the labour movement as a whole and its partial trade-union expression. Such a revolution will inevitably call forth a vigorous opposition from a part of the trade-union leadership. But it is high time for the working masses of social democracy to learn how to express their capacity for decision and action, and therewith to demonstrate their ripeness for that time of great struggles and great tasks in which they, the masses, will be the actual chorus and the directing bodies will merely act the “speaking parts,” that is, will only be the interpreters of the will of the masses.

The trade-union movement is not that which is reflected in the quite understandable *but irrational* illusion of a minority of the trade-union leaders, but that which lives in the consciousness of the mass of proletarians who have been won for the class struggle. In this consciousness the trade-union movement is part of social democracy. “And what it is, that should it dare to appear.”

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